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The Store For SPIES

*Using electronic wizardry
to stop terrorists, snoopers*

By Diana West
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It was a little like something out of a James Bond movie — or maybe more like an old "Avengers" TV episode.

"CCS Counterspy Shop," answered a hearty male voice on the other end of the phone.

"I'd like to speak with Mr. Hawkins for a free consultation, please," said a young woman a little nervously, reading the name from a somewhat cryptic ad in the morning paper.

"Just a moment," the man said.

The ad was just another one of those small rectangular patches in an advertising crazy quilt, a newspaper page where contact lenses and diamond rings strain to shine outside of their newsprint boxes.

But this particular ad was different from the rest; it was actually provocative. Even the ad touting a sale on "panty waist nippers" (with an illustration) paled in comparison.

"Could Someone Be BUGGING You or TAPPING Your Phones?" the ad demanded. An oversize question mark standing on top of a drawing of a phone added a slightly preposterous but nonetheless exciting touch to the question. "Let CCS find out," it urged.

"Who could be bugging you?" the ad continued. "Partners, rivals, friends, relatives, associates, enemies, spouses, competitors, etc. CCS can help you find out for sure. For a free consultation, call: Mr. Hawkins."

And there on the phone, finally, was Mr. Hawkins. "Yes, this is he. What can I do for you?"

She didn't precisely know. "Well, what exactly do you do?"

"We specialize in all kinds of counterespionage and anti-

terrorism equipment," he explained. "And we can detect bugs and wiretaps on your phones. But," he added confidently, "I don't like to get into it too much over the phone. You never know what the disposition of the telephone is."

Counterespionage and anti-terrorism equipment? Wiretaps? Is this for real? And if Mr. Hawkins doesn't know what the "disposition" of the telephone is, who does?

Situated on the lower level of an overwhelmingly unexotic office building cum mall on K Street, the CCS Counterspy Shop stands cheek by jowl with such eclectic establishments as a religious bookstore whose wares spill out into the hall ("Read The Book as advertised on TV," urges one display), and an ordinary camera store.

The shop itself, to the casual passer-by, is a small and even unimpressive spot, its plain pine board shelves stocked unimaginatively with cardboard boxes containing only slightly unusual wares, such as super high-tech phones and radios. Its glass counters are manned by a slim, older woman with smooth white hair.

"Can I help you?" she asked brightly, leaning comfortably over the counter above an intriguing little item called "The Security Blanket," a flashlight with a beam of 5 million lumens that "causes total disorientation and leaves the intended victim time to escape."

"I have an appointment with Mr. Hawkins."

"He's not here," said the woman. "But perhaps someone else can help you."

"That's funny," the customer said. "I just spoke to him and arranged to meet him here."

"He's not in right now, can I help you?" said a mustachioed young man who had just emerged through a

door leading to another room at the rear of the store. "Right this way."

Where was Mr. Hawkins? the prospective customer wondered as she followed the man back through the door, walking past a table arranged with briefcases open to reveal what turned out to be letter-bomb detectors. Mr. Hawkins had set up the appointment not half an hour ago.

"There is no Mr. Hawkins," admitted Bill Roth with a smile as he eased himself into a chair behind his paper-strewn desk in one corner of the room. "You talked to me on the phone earlier," he said. "We just use

'Mr. Hawkins' to tell us who's calling us from the ad."

And as for the retail shop out front, "that's basically a screening area we use to determine if someone needs to meet with us in private back here," continued Mr. Roth. "And Sydel is really good at that," he added with a grin, referring to the lady minding the store. "Now what kind of problem do you have?"

CCS Communications Inc., a New York-based company with offices all over the world, from Paris to Beverly Hills, specializes in solving the unusual array of "security problems" of an unusual array of people — from potentates with revolutionary populaces, to embassies with eavesdroppers, to estranged spouses with overzealous ex-spouses. In their Manhattan offices, they design most of the equipment that they sell.

The company was founded 10 years ago by Ben Jamil, a man who got his start in 1955 by rewiring antique French telephones. Soon, his company, Telephones Unlimited, was selling fancy phones to the ritziest stores, ringing up sales of \$7 million annually. And that's when AT&T sued. In 1969, after a long court battle, Mr. Jamil won.

Mr. Jamil then sold that company and turned his attention from designing telephones to protecting them against eavesdroppers. "It's so simple to tap a phone," explained Mr. Roth. "You can mail away for a cheap bug from the back of one of those electronics magazines. And they're so easy to put on," he added.

CCS, however, does not sell bugs or wiretaps. Mr. Roth asserted, "We sell defensive equipment only" — \$20 million worth of defensive equipment each year, to be precise.

While CCS' defensive equipment couldn't save the Peacock Throne for the shah of Iran, the company did design for him a "VIP Security

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Sedan," a quarter-of-a-million-dollar Cadillac that was something like a cross between Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and a Sherman tank — a high-tech chariot that made James Bond's niftiest little XKE seem like a Ford Fiesta with a few frills.

"It had everything," says Mr. Roth, admiring the poster of the car on the wall above his desk. "Tear gas ducts, oil slicks, night vision equipment built into it, machine gun portals in the sides to return fire, ramming bumpers..." his voice trailed off.

Needless to say, bullets had no chance of penetrating this car — and it could also withstand the impact of a hand grenade bursting on the roof or a land mine exploding beneath the body. Sound like the kind of car that just might get you through rush hour?

But that's only the first round of extras. If any undesirable was foolhardy enough to climb in and sit next

to the driver, he was target for three shotgun shells pointed toward his derriere that were ready to blast off at the mere flick of a switch. (Originally, the design included a device that would instantaneously squash the seat and its occupant against the roof of the car, but the engineers decided that would be too messy.)

"But the shah never took delivery of it, because it was completed right before he was deposed," recounted Mr. Roth. "And in Mexico, where he went after that, the roads couldn't take that large a car." So CCS put the car on the market at \$155,000 — a steal at the price. "And they did sell it to somebody," mumbled Mr. Roth secretively.

But the bread and butter of the operation aren't to be found in hot and spicy sedans. There are, after all, only so many potentates in the world. Much of CCS' work and wares involve prevention of telephone eavesdropping or detection of eavesdropping, and the firm sells a host of costly gadgets. They range from thiefproof briefcases, which

double as bulletproof shields; Voice, Stress Analyzers, which may make lie detectors obsolete; night vision equipment; and that perennial favorite, mirrored glasses which allow you to see what's coming up from your rear.

"Typically in this business you find a lot of real junk on the market," said Mr. Roth. "Lights and buzzers and whistles and gizmos that really don't do anything. But our stuff works."

As Mr. Roth showed a customer a mass of flips, switches, and coils that make up a \$10,000 telephone scrambler, he nodded to a tall blond man with tassels on his shoes. Wearing a tightly cinched trenchcoat, the man was nonchalantly browsing through a rack of bulletproof vests, looking strikingly like, well, something out of a spy thriller.

"Do you always know who your clients are?" the customer asked after the man had silently disappeared through the door.

"No," said Mr. Roth, "but we won't sell to anyone we know is trying to evade a federal agent." But of course, they don't always know who the client really is. Mr. Roth mentioned that often clients will pay in cash and ask that the invoice be made out to "Mr. Cash."

"We don't sell to anyone from Libya, Iran, the Soviet Union, Nicaragua — any government, in fact, that's not friendly with the United States, even if they're not blacklisted," he continued. "We're a very patriotic company."

"A lot of embassies are stepping up their equipment demands," offered Mr. Roth, pointing to his day's call sheet that listed about a dozen different embassies, ranging from the Philippines to the Ivory Coast. "What's really happening there is that the new Soviet Embassy is on a very high elevation and will be able to intercept a lot of different communications. So the governments are going out and buying a lot of scramblers."

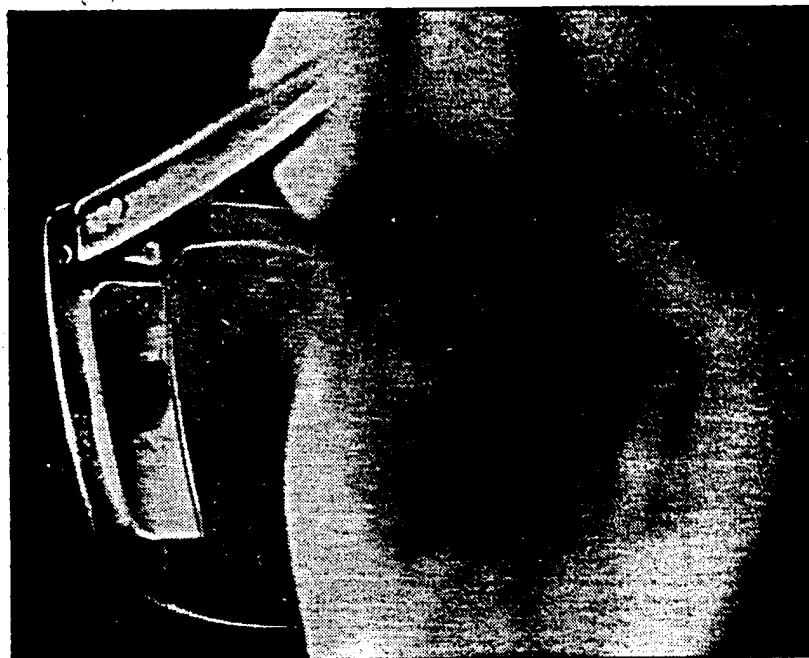
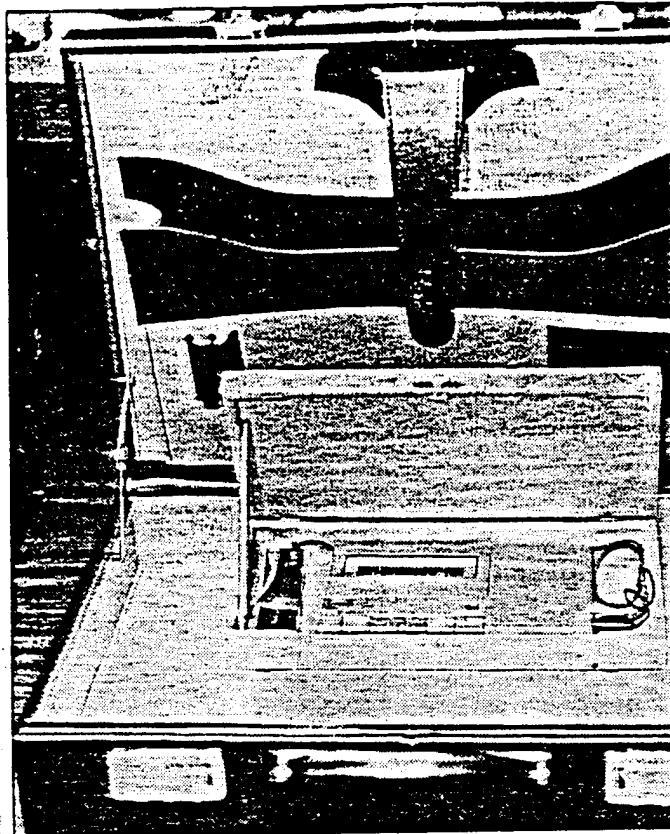
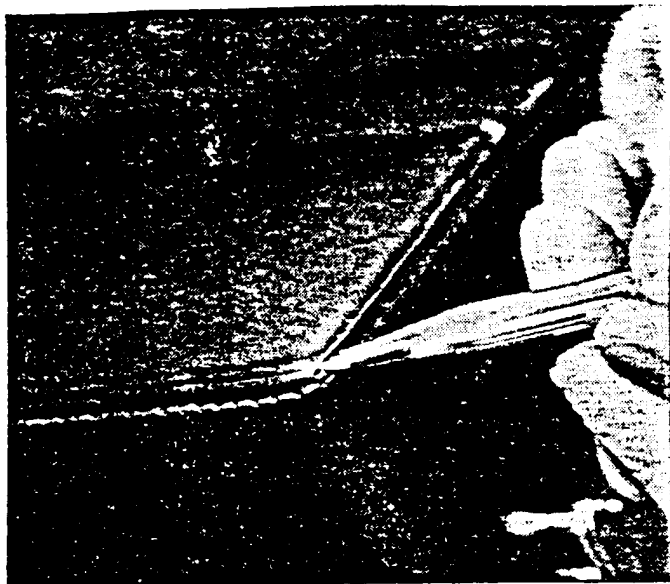
But not all of CCS' clients flit about international circles. And, Mr. Roth said, "This is not a toy shop for rich people — which is what a lot of people think when they come in. Last week we worked for a guy who's a fairly well-off businessman with several children, and he's received a lot of kidnap threats against them. So we're designing him little transmitters to put in his kids' belt buckles so that if the kids are kidnapped, he can go up in an airplane with a radio direction finder and pick them out."

"And you should have seen me in Columbus last week," said Mr. Roth, describing a "sweep" performed of an unidentified person's house. "What we actually found were the remnants of a wiretap right at the entrance to the house, put there by members of the man's family. They must have known the guy was having his house swept and they pulled it off. But the wires were stripped and we found the jumpers," he said. "It took about two days to find." Did the man know why he was being tapped?

"It was all over a dispute over a will. He was the beneficiary and some other members of his family were fighting him for it."

"We get all kinds in here," said Mr. Roth. "Arab sheiks with their entou-rages, businessmen, housewives, everybody. And to us, everyone's a little bit exotic, because if you've got a problem, you've got a problem."

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Photos by Richard Kozak/The Washington Times

Top: CCS' Bill Roth shows a combination briefcase-tape recorder. Above: Eyeglasses with "rear-view" mirrors.